




BC Children's Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, provides expert care for the province's most seriously ill or injured children, including newborns and adolescents. BC Children's is an academic health centre affiliated with the University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University, and the Child & Family Research Institute. For more information, please visit www.bcchildrens.ca.

The Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) plans, manages and evaluates selected specialty and province-wide health care services across BC, working with the five geographic health authorities to deliver province-wide solutions that improve the health of British Columbians. For more information, please visit www.phsa.ca.

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PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

Warning for parents to keep children away from gas fireplaces November 9, 2009

Vancouver, B.C. – B.C. has one of the highest fireplace per capita rates in North America, but with the cold weather approaching, BC Children's cautions new parents and caregivers to be aware of the risks of gas fireplaces.

"We treat a lot of kids every year with serious burns to their hands or face because they touched the glass in front of gas fireplaces," says Dr. Cynthia Verchere, Plastic Surgeon and Medical Director of the Burn Unit at BC Children's Hospital, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority. "Most of these children were burned with their parents in the same room, who just weren't able to get there in time. It takes less than a second to deeply burn the skin of the palm or face with the high heat of the glass, and sometimes the kids can't pull themselves away."

These children endure painful dressings, skin grafts, casts, and pressure gloves, multiple visits to doctors and clinics, and post-healing scar monitoring that bring them and their families back to BC Children's long after the accident.

"Young children are attracted to the toddler-height glass and the flickering flame," says Alyson McKendrick, Coordinator of Safe Start, BC Children's injury prevention program. "Most fireplace burns happen when children touch or fall against the hot glass."

McKendrick warns that the glass of a gas fireplace heats up to 200°C (400°F) in six minutes and can take up to 45 minutes to cool down. She advises that parents and caregivers should avoid using gas fireplaces when young children are near and should turn them off well in advance of children's visits. McKendrick also advises parents to teach children not to touch the glass, even if they don't see flames. It is important to be aware that the pilot light may also heat the glass enough to cause a burn. The safest way to avoid these burn injuries is to use the fireplace in the evening when children have gone to bed.

"We need to teach people why they need a screen or barrier in front of their gas fireplaces that bolts into the fireplace itself or the wall," adds Dr. Verchere. "I know people think screens take away from the beauty of a fireplace, but these days, there are attractive ones. They are integral in preventing burns. It's like using car seats and seatbelts—there is an inconvenience and expense, but safety of a child should always prevail."

Gas fireplace technology is improving every year. But if your first child is now a toddler, you are a caregiver, or you have visiting grandchildren, you need to know how to protect them from serious burns.

To learn more about child safety, visit www.bcchildrens.ca/safestart or call the Safety Station advisory service on home safety at 1-888-331-8100. You can also contact your fireplace manufacturer, or visit www.hpba.org to locate one near you.

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- Digital images of burns are available.
- Dr. Cynthia Verchere and Alyson McKendrick are available for interviews.